

MUNICIPAL CULTURAL ADVISORY COMMISSIONS: PUBLIC MODEL LOCAL ARTS AGENCIES IN THE UNITED STATES

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By

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ABSTRACT

An exploratory study seeking baseline information about how small municipalities are integrating arts and culture into community planning efforts through the use of public model Local Arts Agencies. Utilizing review of government documents, surveys of municipal commissions and interviews, data collection resulted in a preliminary distinction of Municipal Cultural Advisory Commissions from the existent pool of Local Arts Agencies and defined characteristics of the new category.

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LIST OF TERMS

Export Products - Creative economics categorizes stationary arts, culture and heritage attractions as “export products” because the revenue they generate comes largely from out-of-town visitors.

Incorporated Place - An incorporated place is a concentration of population with its own government structure. It differs from a Census Designated Place by virtue of having a government.

Local Arts Agencies (LAAs) - Organizations referred to as arts councils, departments of cultural affairs, or arts commissions make up the field of local arts agencies. LAAs can be private, nonprofit entities; others are public municipal, county, or regional agencies that operate in cooperation with mayors and city managers. (National Endowment for the Arts n.d.)

Municipality (n) – 1: a primarily urban political unit having corporate status and usually powers of self-government; 2: the governing body of a municipality (Merriam-Webster 2013)

Municipal Cultural Advisory Commission (MCAC) - A public-model Local Arts Agency established to advise a Municipality on matters of arts, culture and heritage for incorporation into planning for the betterment of the community.

Percent for Art - Many municipalities have ordinances that earmark 1% of the lowest bid on any building contract for public art. These funds are required to be managed by people who have an interest and knowledge of art.

INTRODUCTION

In the United States, Local Arts Agencies¹ exist to advance and support the arts as an integrated part of the community fabric. They use the arts to address social, educational and economic problems. Though highly diverse in their operations, funding, governance, activities and *raison d'être*, all strive to be a catalyst for the arts and of service to their communities.

The Research Problem

While all US states and territories, six identified regions², and many large cities across the country have staffed Arts Agencies, many smaller cities and otherwise identified municipalities lack the resources to commit full-time staff and funding to the integration of arts and culture across planning. For decades, communities have been resolving this problem by forming Local Arts Agencies (LAAs). However, where these LAAs were once small in number and exclusively private nonprofit organizations, Americans for the Arts has estimated that in 2010, up to 25% of some 5,000 LAAs were public entities—agencies of city government.³

Research by Americans for the Arts indicated that public LAAs were more likely to be found in medium to large communities while smaller communities

¹ Organizations referred to as arts councils, departments of cultural affairs, or arts commissions make up the field of local arts agencies (LAAs). LAAs can be private, nonprofit entities; others are public municipal, county, or regional agencies that operate in cooperation with mayors and city managers. (National Endowment for the Arts n.d.)

² (National Assembly of State Arts Agencies 2012)

³ (Americans for the Arts 2012)

were more likely to utilize the private model by forming a nonprofit organization for the purpose. My experience with Lansdowne, Pennsylvania, a borough with a population between 10,500 and 11,000 (notably smaller than average for all Pennsylvania incorporated places by about 1,000 people⁴, 0.13% of the size of New York City, 0.7% of the size of nearby Philadelphia and just about 10% of the size of Broken Arrow, Oklahoma, the 285th largest city in the United States⁵), an all- volunteer government and an appointed advisory Arts Board, led me to question if there may be a growing number of smaller cities and incorporated places that were using this model as well, and how they were doing it.

Given the current research presented by Americans for the Arts, any other small governments that were operating an LAA with a public model, with a volunteer government or governing body would likely believe that it was the only one of its kind. By researching the models of public LAAs across the United States, I would be able to create a baseline for further research on the models, including research on their varying levels of effectiveness and best practices for formation and governance, which could help further community arts agendas nationwide as federal funding and arts education are rapidly disappearing.

This research study examines how small municipalities are integrating arts and culture into community planning efforts. It is an exploratory research into the workings of MCACs and aims to provide a baseline for identifying these entities

⁴ (U.S. Census 2012)

⁵ (Wikipedia 2012)

that already exist in the municipal government. The expectation is to not only generate a view of the current state, but also open up avenues for further research.

My experience in Lansdowne has led me to question whether these public model Local Arts Agencies would benefit from communicating their goals, strategies and best practices with one another and with other municipalities. Each has been working through establishment and operating without peer support. As a result, many seem to be reinventing the wheel, unaware that another municipality (or many) has already been through many of the trials it may experience.

Review of the Literature

Due to the relative newness of public LAAs, their rarity, and the lack of funding for government projects that aren't deemed essential, there isn't a body of literature that deals with them directly. Largely, the purpose of this original empirical study is to provide a baseline for further research into the subject matter.

Americans for the Arts produced a small research project regarding Local Arts Agencies in 2010. The published work consists of a single-page presentation illustrating the exponential growth in the number of LAAs from 1965 through 2010, programs reported by LAAs, including 94% "arts programming," and very broad definition, which can be used as a starting point:

A local arts agency (LAA) is a community organization or an agency of local government that supports cultural organizations, provides services to artists and/or arts organizations, and presents

*arts programming to the public. Each LAA in America is unique to the community that it serves, and each changes as its community changes—no two are exactly alike. In 2010, local arts agencies will administer an estimated \$765 million in local government funds for the arts.*⁶

It is the Americans for the Arts' website that provides the most in-depth information and resources, including separating LAAs into the “public” and “private” models, noting general trends in governance, funding and tax status, and mentioning that “Increasingly, public LAAs are located throughout municipal government”⁷. Here, Americans for the Arts also provides an outline of how to start a LAA, but given the broad range of entities that name covers, the resource understandably lacks specificity. The generalized qualities of public LAAs are listed here as including: being part of the city government; largely funded by the government; spending the majority of funds on contracts and grants to local artists and cultural institutions; and being found in medium to large communities.⁸

It is relevant to note that the field has, for some time, indicated that there is intrinsic value to the arts in communities. Joshua Guetzkow provides a neat synopsis of the public and private benefits, and the pitfalls in each argument, in his work *How the Arts Impact Communities*. Guetzkow additionally provides an expanded chart of the *Mechanisms of Arts Impact* in a community.⁹ The goals of

⁶ (Americans for the Arts 2010)

⁷ (Americans for the Arts 2012)

⁸ (Americans for the Arts 2012)

⁹ (Guetzkow 2002)

LAAAs, as expressed in this text, to promote and support the community through the promotion and support of the arts, are widely accepted as promising.

Again, Americans for the Arts provides a range of research to support Guetzkow and the more than 60 researchers whose work he categorizes. Focusing heavily on the economic impact that so troubles Guetzkow, Americans for the Arts also cites The College Board's research on SAT scores (which says that students with four years of arts programming in high school score on average 100 points higher on the test), University of Pennsylvania research on civic engagement and Dun & Bradstreet data regarding the Creative Industries.¹⁰

Research Methodology

In beginning my research for this project, I first sought to find any other surveys of Local Arts Organizations. Utilizing the Drexel University Library and Google Scholar, I searched using a variety of terms to describe the LAAs under the public model. Efforts yielded fewer than fifty potentially relevant results, including many calls for volunteers (from which I noted the name of the municipality¹¹), a few media articles about the formation or actions of a LAA, and a few scholarly works on the value of arts in communities and the efficacy of government art agencies.¹²

¹⁰ (Americans for the Arts 2012)

¹¹Municipality (n) 1 : a primarily urban political unit having corporate status and usually powers of self-government

2: the governing body of a municipality (Merriam-Webster 2013)

¹²To confirm my findings, I consulted with Tom Ipri, Drexel University Liason Librarian for the College of Media Arts and Design. Mr. Ipri concurred that there was only very sparse information available on the subject (Ipri 2012)

Next, I began my search for LAAs to survey and interview. To do this, I first had to identify my criteria. The entities I was looking for were LAAs of the public model, with all unpaid members, and operated mainly in an advisory capacity. After identifying these anticipated characteristics, I dubbed these entities Municipal Cultural Advisory Commissions (MCACs).

These criteria eliminated several kinds of LAAs from my study straight away. Obviously, this eliminates all private LAAs (such as the Media Arts Council, Norristown Arts Council, both of which were included in my early surveys of possible subjects). It also removed the many boards established exclusively to manage Percent for Art funds¹³ for the purchase and maintenance of physical works of public art. Likewise, I also sought to leave out entities for which the main function was programming or grant-making and found that often they were the private LAAs. During my subsequent search for suitable research subjects, mainly utilizing Google and combinations of my previous search terms (such as “arts board,” “art commission,” “arts council,” “arts and culture commission”), I was able to identify and discard several LAAs that definitely did not fit the parameters of an MCAC. I also identified thirty-one LAAs that appeared to meet my criteria for inclusion in my study.

Given the Americans for the Arts estimation that 25% of some 5,000 LAAs have a public model, my sample was surprisingly small. This is likely due to the lack of resources and staffing for MCACs, as well as the potential absence

¹³ Many municipalities have ordinances that earmark 1% of the lowest bid on any building contract for public art. These funds must be managed by people who have an interest and knowledge of art, which is not often the municipal government.

of internet savvy among government appointees. However, as a thesis research project and an exploratory research project, the limited size is appropriate. Had my sample been much bigger, I would have been forced to limit my scope in another way, such as focusing on only the origins, governance or funding of MCACs, which would result in a partial view of the subject.

Having established my research subjects, I began to formulate my survey (see Appendix 1- Survey Text). My intention was to collect basic information about the subjects: the municipalities themselves (size, classification) as well the MCAC (governance, funding, manning and activities), and to establish a list of contacts for follow-up interviews. Knowing the resource/staffing constraints on municipal governments in the current economic climate it was imperative to me that the survey should be short and easy so that municipal employees would be willing to participate. As such, I used my survey questions to collect small amounts of qualitative and quantitative data, and to open the door to further discussion via interview.

It was my expectation that, since the MCACs have developed largely independently, over nearly 80 years and are geographically separated, the results of my survey would not indicate 100% matching in any area. I anticipated that my results would show that most MCACs shared at least four out of seven basic characteristics: (1) being in an incorporated place, (2) operating with a public model, (3) volunteer-run, (4) functioning mainly in an advisory capacity, (5)

similarities in population size, (6) similar budget size¹⁴, (7) having been started as a grassroots or community-organized answer to a perceived need.

Sixteen of the thirty-one municipalities to which I distributed my survey responded. Of those, I was forced to eliminate five surveys which did not meet my original criteria after all, for the same reasons I set forth when eliminating LAAs from the population: either they existed to manage Percent for Art funds or they were independent nonprofit organizations. Additionally, one respondent indicated that the entity had been formed as an arm of the local government, but would be changing to the private model at the end of 2012. Since all of the data up until that point was valid to my research, I elected to keep that response. Three others indicated that the management of Percent for Art funds and public art were a part, but not the sum, of their functions. Their surveys are also included in my report as they do not manage the funds to the exclusion of all other activities.

I analyzed the response to my survey both qualitatively, as individual issues and individual municipalities, and quantitatively, charting the characteristics in common, the sizes, and the operations of my subjects.

Having established a bank of potential interview subjects from my survey, I used a combination of telephone, email and in-person follow-up interviews to gain information about the formation of the MCACs. I based my questions for

¹⁴ Before I had collected my results, not being an expert on US incorporated places, I had no specific prediction regarding population and budget size but that there would be a range of sized on the smaller end, certainly not First Class Cities, as I understood them based on the Pennsylvania Code: a city of the First Class has a population of more than one million. Philadelphia is the only city of the First Class in Pennsylvania. I have since learned that other states place different population limits, or none at all, on First Class cities.

these interviews on the survey responses and research I did, mainly on the municipality's or the MCAC's website. I used this opportunity to clarify some answers (such as responses that another municipality inspired the formation of the MCAC), or to collect some additional data (such as in cases wherein the year the MCAC was established did not appear on its website) and request founding documents, if they were not available to the public online. In two cases, I was able to speak at length to the interviewee about the history of the MCAC and problems it faced.

I am obligated to note that, since beginning this research in November of 2011, I have been appointed to a four-year term on the Lansdowne Arts Board (January 2012-December 2015). My experience as an intern for the Arts Board in late 2010 provided the inspiration for this project by introducing me to the world of MCACs. I considered excluding Lansdowne from my research population, but given the small sample and the ready availability of the original advocates and members of the Arts Board, I felt that the opportunity for data collection was unique and valuable. Borough Councilperson Ellen Lustgarten, who was a member of council through the inception of the Arts Board, completed my survey and allowed me to interview her.

CHAPTER ONE- CONTEXT

MCACs have evolved specifically to fit within established government structures, acting as supports and bridges between the government's programs and goals. The following is an outline of those structures as a context for the MCACs.

Federal Interests in Arts & Culture

The United States government identifies six Federal Arts Agencies: the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA); the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH); the President's Committee on Arts and Humanities (PCAH); the Indian Arts and Crafts Board (IACB); the US Commission of Fine Arts (CFA); and the National Gallery of Art (NGA)¹⁵. Of these, two exist primarily to divide funds among State and Regional Arts Agencies: the NEA and the NEH. Two agencies function mainly as advisory boards, advising federal agencies and the president on matters of arts, humanities, design and aesthetics: these are PCAH and the CFA. The remaining two Federal Arts Agencies, the IACB and the NGA, operate programs and facilities as well as providing resources to the public, though, of course, in the case of the IACB, the public consists of a narrow band of the population.

As with LAAs, the Federal Arts Agencies fall into the government structure at different levels and in different departments, with some even acting as direct advisors to others, as is the relationship between the PCAH and both the

¹⁵ (USA.gov n.d.)

NEA and NEH, which were established by the National Foundation on the Arts and Humanities Act of 1965 as independent agencies of the federal government. The IACB, on the other hand, is an agency under the Department of the Interior, and is driven to enforce truth in advertising of arts and crafts products that, while Native in design or mode, are not actually Native-made. Likewise, the governance of the Federal Arts agencies varies, with almost entirely appointed leadership, split between compensated and uncompensated. As such, and unsurprisingly, the Federal Arts Agencies closely follow the public model of arts agencies, with the exception of the NGA which operates on a mixed model.¹⁶

State & Regional Arts Agencies

Every state and all six US territories (American Samoa, the District of Columbia, Guam, Northern Marianas, Puerto Rico and the US Virgin Islands) also have State Arts Agencies. These were largely established in 1965 with the establishment of the NEA, with few exceptions.

Though Utah and New York had already formed arts agencies by 1965, Congress's requirement that the NEA allocate funds to any state that had an arts agency catalyzed the swift completion of the State Arts Agency map. In addition to NEA funding, State Arts Agencies are funded by other federal agencies, private donors and even earned income. Oversight is provided by a board or commission appointed by the governor or state legislature and State Arts Agencies have a

¹⁶ (Senate and House of Representative of the United States of America in Congress 1965) (National Endowment for the Humanities n.d.) (National Endowment for the Arts n.d.) (President's Committee on the Arts and Humanities n.d.) (US Commission of Fine Arts 2002) (National Gallery of Art 2013) (Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress 1990)

broad range of functions including grant-making, arts education, cultural planning, research, teacher and entrepreneur training, cultural preservation and recognition of artistic excellence and accomplishment.¹⁷

In addition, the entire United States and four territories are covered by the Regional Arts Organizations (Regionals), which were established in the late 1960s and early 1970s for much the same reasons as LAAs.

After the establishment of the NEA, which specifically allowed for funds distributed to states, and the subsequent development of State Arts Agencies, seven Regionals began to form to work on issues that affected multiple states. The State Arts Agencies funded the Regionals in part to help provide performing arts to locations far from major cultural centers. In 1973, the NEA amended its legislature to allow for funding to the Regionals, allowing the NEA to directly fund the organizations that were most effectively able to deliver touring and performing arts programming.

Today, the six Regionals¹⁸ are privately held nonprofit organizations, still funded by the NEA and still with the founding purpose and goals. They are primarily programming organizations, with an emphasis on touring. In conjunction with the NEA, they bring Shakespeare, jazz, dance and exhibitions all

¹⁷ (National Assembly of State Arts Agencies n.d.)

¹⁸ Though seven Regionals were originally established, today there are only six: Arts Midwest, Mid-America Arts Alliance, Mid Atlantic Arts Foundation, New England Foundation for the Arts, South Arts, and Western States Arts Federation

over the United States, and US art to international locales. Other functions include grant-making, employment and marketing services, and research.¹⁹

Public Local Arts Organizations: Commissions and Boards

At all levels of government, commissions and boards are utilized to advise the executive on any number of matters. Generally, the members of these are appointed by the executive and serve voluntarily (uncompensated), or for an incidental stipend. The federal government has commissions on everything from postal stamp design to nuclear waste disposal.

State and local governments also utilize commissions. The District of Columbia has commissions so disparate as the Advisory Committee on Acupuncture and the Child Fatality Review board²⁰. Washington State, likewise has over 200 boards and commissions and a published ethics document (compiled, of course, by the Ethics Board). MCACs fall under this category, as boards or commissions, or, rarely, as a subset of this category as a committee of a board or commission.

Private Local Arts Organizations: Grassroots & Community Arts Organizations

Historically, “the arts” have been defined by traditional, largely European forms: opera, ballet, painting, theater. Meanwhile, art-makers and cultural heritage preservers the world over have been existing on the fringes of high society, in the kitchens and fields, holding their traditions close and passing them on generation after generation. Recently though, Americans have sought to bring

¹⁹ (RAO n.d.)

²⁰ (District of Columbia n.d.)

the arts to the broader communities, celebrating the existing culture and creating cultural exchange by forming community-based arts organizations.

Often, these organizations are centered on the community benefits of the arts and a drive toward artistic excellence. They use traditional forms, innovation and encouragement to achieve goals relating to education, social and political advocacy, civic pride, economic development and even health. They feature young people, outcasts, technology and people of color more than ever before. They are using art to teach history, tolerance and self-esteem. Small, community-based nonprofit arts organizations are changing the field of play in the United States.²¹

²¹ (Chew 2009)

CHAPTER TWO- ORIGINS

As early as the 1920s, United States cities were including Arts Commissions in their charters. However, the bulk of the MCACs that I researched were established in 1965 or later—the year the NEA was founded. Appearing mostly in the Northwest, Southwest and Mid-Atlantic, the pattern of development mirrors the NEA’s reported arts participation. It seems plausible that a combination of available federal funding and pre-existing interest in the arts sparked many of the MCACs’ creation.



Figure 1- Map of Research Population

Responses to my survey validated my expectation that all of the MCACs would be established in incorporated places²². Nine out of the eleven responses, however, were from localities that are classified as cities. Cities are incorporated places, but my expectation had been that a larger part of the responses would be classified in another way, such as boroughs (one response), townships, towns, counties (one response of “city/county” was received) and villages. Neither my list-generating research nor the survey responses indicated that MCACs exist in neighborhoods or urban villages²³, which sometimes have informal governance in the form of neighborhood watches and homeowners’ associations. Had such entities been found, however, it would contaminate the results to include them as they have no actual government authority.

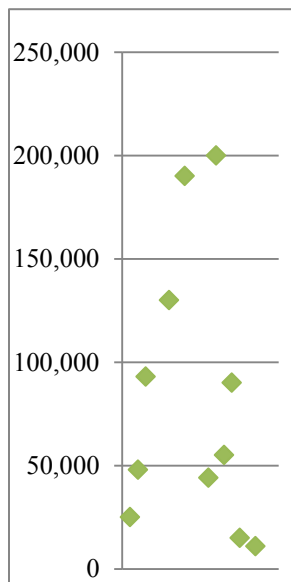


Figure 2- Population Size

The eleven valid responses came from places ranging in population size from 11,000 to 200,000. This indicates that it is likely that MCACs develop in smaller cities—two-thirds the size of Pittsburgh at the largest, to continue on a theme—though some of the respondents actually fall just below the hundred most populated cities in the country. Nearly half (46%) served populations of fewer than 50,000 people. The remaining 54% fell half in the fifty- to 100-thousand range and half in the 100- to

²² An incorporated place is a concentration of population with its own government structure. It differs from a Census Designated Place by virtue of having government, which CDPs do not.

²³ The term “urban village” refers to urban neighborhoods characterized by medium-density development, mixed use zoning, good public transportation and improved pedestrian and public spaces.

200- thousand range. The relatively compact range of populations provides support for my expectation that MCACs would be found in places with similar population sizes. The range of populations in cities in the United States is enormous and varies widely from region to region and state to state.

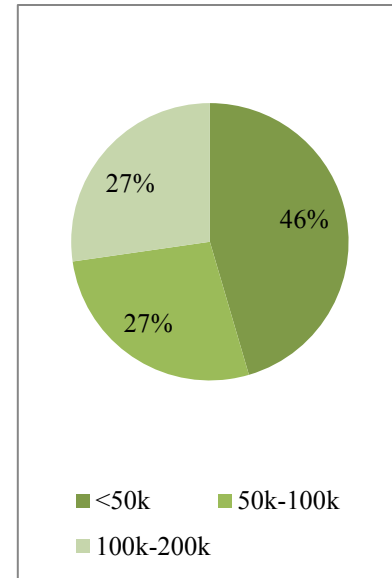


Figure 3- Population Percentages

The majority of the self-reported inspiration for the formation of the entities did not fall into the categories included in the survey and 56% of the sixteen original respondents chose “other” to describe the impetus. After removing the invalid responses and normalizing the data collected to include grassroots organizing and passion projects²⁴, the results showed that 64%²⁵ of the MCACs started because of internal community interest. The remaining 36% (four respondents) indicated “other,” including several in Washington State. Though Washington appears to be a hotbed of LAAs, and therefore naturally appears to have more MCACs than other states, it would be valuable to look for other reasons for Washington’s unusually high concentration of MCACs.

²⁴ Some responses selected “other” as the source of inspiration, but identified the “other” as community members’ passion projects or grassroots community support, both of which are “internal” to the place.

²⁵ Two “other” responses were from entities developed in 1965 and the reporters did not know what the reason was. Given the significance of the timeframe in national arts and culture government support, it seems more likely than not that the inspiration came from outside of the community—either another locality or the lure of federal funding.

Origin stories vary widely across the MCACs, and in many cases, the reasons for the establishment have faded out of the consciousness with time. The Lansdowne Arts Board is one of the most recently established MCACs in my research sample. In 2009, Borough Council adopted “Resolution 2009-17 (A resolution of the borough of Lansdowne proclaiming itself an Arts Destination Community)” at the encouragement of Councilman Stephen Wagner, Economic Development Committee Chair. In addition to the creation and maintenance of the Arts Board, the Resolution included the adoption of the following objectives:

- *Develop public policy that considers arts initiative a priority*
- *Recognize the arts as a positive agent of social and economic change*
- *Dedicate public funding toward the arts*
- *Encourage private investment in the arts*
- *Foster growth of highly-regarded arts programs*
- *Develop strategies for creating sustainable work/live/show environments for artists*²⁶

Councilperson Wagner, and the Borough, observed that the independent nonprofit organization, the Lansdowne Economic Development Corporation (LEDC), was experiencing success using the arts for economic development. It became apparent that this was a strategy that could be valuable to the economically depressed town in transition and the resolution was written to establish formal goals and protocols, as well as to “put some teeth behind”²⁷ the existing across-

²⁶ (Lansdowne Borough Council 2009)

²⁷ (Lustgarden 2013)

the-board support. Councilperson Lustgarten made it clear that in large part the success of the two entities is due to their cooperation. The LEDC and the Borough do not compete with each other, in fact, they often collaborate, especially on applying for grants. Lansdowne has no real tax revenue to fund the Arts Board, due in part to the current economic conditions. Though some thought has been put into a Percent for Art program, no movement has occurred yet since there is little development in Lansdowne and the intention of the Arts Board was not to plan events, but to provide recommendations to Council about how the government can attract artists to live, work and play in town.

Established in 2002 under the guidance of Mayor Richard Abel, the Athens (Ohio) Municipal Arts Commission (AMAC) works in conjunction with the Parks and Recreation Board toward the addition of public art in the city, but also has purposes, powers and duties that strongly resemble the Lansdowne Arts Boards'. Mayor Abel and City Council sought public support for the establishment of the commission before passing Ordinance No. 0-46-02, § I, 5-6-2002.²⁸

The Vandalia, Ohio, Cultural Arts Advisory Committee is likewise recently established, with the tasks of advising the Vandalia-Butler Foundation of the Dayton Foundation on the distribution of funds as well as advising the City Council and promoting the mission of the Vandalia Cultural Arts Program (VCAP), established in 2001 with the mission to “exclusively benefit the City of Vandalia and its residents by providing revenue to support artistic and cultural

²⁸ (Chiki 2013)

activities, programs, performances, and organizations, or for other purposes as determined by Vandalia City Council and the Advisory Committee.”²⁹ The VCAP was driven by City Manager Bruce Sucher and supported by City Council. Public Art in Vandalia (PAIV) was separated from the VCAP in 2008 and boasts a successful Sculpture Symposium, culminating in the permanent installation of five limestone sculptures and an “art crawl.” Though the PAIV is distinct from the VCAP, support and some funding of the PAIV falls under the mission of the VCAP.³⁰

²⁹ (City of Vandalia n.d.)

³⁰ (Farsk 2013)

CHAPTER THREE- OPERATIONS

Because they developed to fill specific needs and largely unrelated to each other, MCACs developed without a set structure of governance, funding or activities. This study observes some trends in those areas, as well as some disparate results.

Governance

The public model of arts agencies is well established in the United States, from the Federal government down. For the public model to be followed the agency must be integrated into the government and its members must be appointed and uncompensated. Each of the eleven valid responses to my survey is governed by appointed members. This is a key component of the MCAC, and, combined with the elimination of exclusively Percent for Art-managing entities, confirmation of the assertion that they are a discrete type of agency.

In the strictest sense, the majority of MCACs that responded do limit the terms of their members; however, given that the literal majority in the case is six out of eleven, this result is inconclusive. Positions on MCACs are voluntary and uncompensated, though some have a staff or staff liaison from the government. These are generally the ones with large programming or funding aspects. In order to further narrow the definition.

Maintaining a MCAC can be a politically precarious position, as the Spokane (Washington) Arts Commission discovered. Through my interview, I

learned that after more than three decades under the public model, the recent election of more conservative mayor has resulted in the city severing support of the Commission and removing it from the government—along with a number of other commissions, boards and services, which are being privatized as much as possible—by laying off all the staff, evicting the program from its office and eventually eliminating funding. With a shocking economic dichotomy of nearly half the city’s population living below the poverty line, the arts and culture “export” products³¹ have played a major role in the local economy historically, a fact which allowed the Council President to broker a deal that the City would continue to provide decreasing funding to the new Spokane Arts Fund for three years. The Fund will receive \$100,000 in 2013, \$80,000 in 2014 and \$60,000 in 2015, affording it desperately-needed time to rewrite the bylaws and create a new strategic plan. The situation in Spokane is, of course, extreme. There is no money in the city budget for anything that can’t be proven valuable and necessary and the economy does not seem to be recovering. Voters and Council agreed to make the cuts and even the State, which has a long history of arts and culture funding, is being forced to make cuts.³²

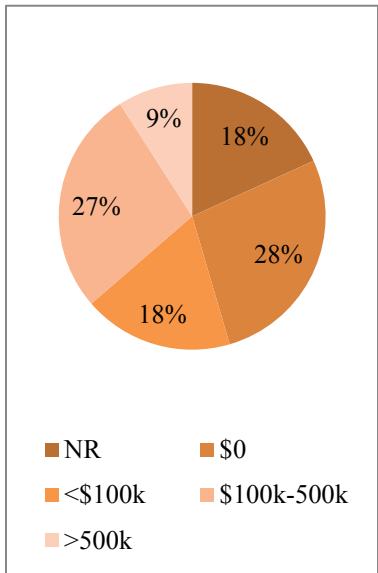
Almost completely across the board, MCACs report to the person or body that holds the power of appointment: the mayor or council. Vandalia, Ohio, Cultural Arts Endowment Fund Advisory Committee (also called the Cultural Arts Advisory Board), however, is appointed by the City Council and makes

³¹ Creative economics categorizes stationary arts, culture and heritage attractions as “export products” because the revenue they generate comes largely from out-of-town visitors.

³² (Mobley 2013)

funding recommendations to the Valdalia-Butler Foundation, a separate community endowment fund under the Dayton Foundation which is not managed by the city government, in addition to serving in an advisory capacity to City Council. The Committee also provides programming at the request of the Council.

Funding



Funding and budgeting of the MCACs is generally inconsistent. Of the valid responses, two did not respond to the question about a budget, three responded that the budget amount was zero dollars, and six reported budget amounts ranging from \$11,000 to nearly \$600,000. The budget non-respondents, however, indicated that the entity is

Figure 4- Budgets

funded through the tax base or general municipal funds. In Lansdowne, the Arts Board makes requests to the Borough Council and all expenses are incurred by the Borough—money is spent, but there is no separate budget. All of the non-budgeted and budget non-respondent MCACs reported that their main function was advisory. (The exception to this was Lansdowne, which reported equal parts advisory and programming. Since early spring of 2012, the Lansdowne Arts Board has been producing a monthly lecture series. The speakers are uncompensated and the space and refreshments are provided by a councilperson.)

The cities of Tacoma and Bellvue, WA, indicated exceptionally high budgets (\$500,000 and \$594,000, respectively) for their mainly advisory commissions. Bellvue reported investments as a funding stream and a function as a Percent for Art manager. The representative from Tacoma declined to be interviewed, but provided *Subchapter 1.28A*²⁷ *Tacoma Arts Commission* of the Tacoma Municipal Code, which indicates that some part of the Commission's responsibilities includes funding, "strategic investment," and potentially, services.³³

Activities

The MCACs provided a wide variety of programming, services and functions to their communities, but at the core, their main function appears to be advisory. Sixty-four percent reported a primary function as advisors to local governments. This is the standard function for any government commission. However, 27% reported a primary programming function, 18% reported a primary grant-making function and 9% reported each service and public art administration/Percent for Art management as primary functions.³⁴

³³ (Tacoma City Council 2009)

³⁴ Five responders reported more than one primary function. Research into their core functions at the time of establishment has not been able to identify a single main function.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the self-reported primary functions and the self-reported budget allocations tell a slightly different

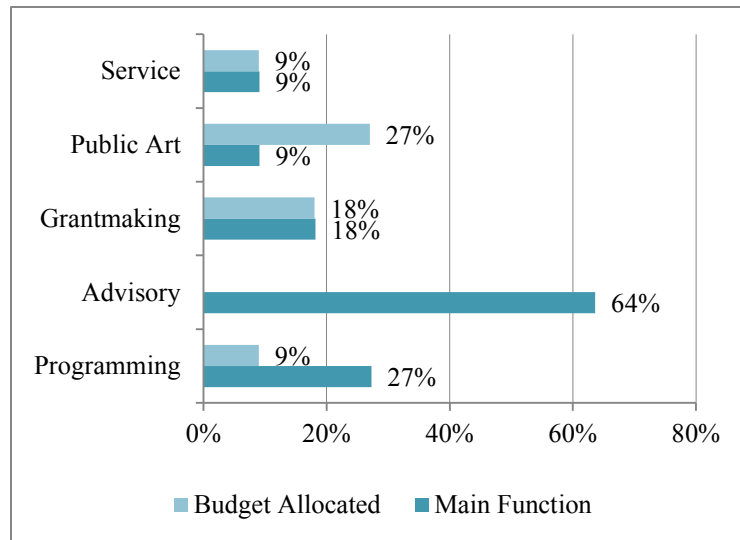


Figure 5- Budget by Function

story. No respondent indicated that any funds were allocated to the advisory function—this is to be expected as the commissions are all voluntary/uncompensated positions—and a only one-third as many reported public art administration and reported budgeting for it, and the opposite was true for programming. The only responses that matched funds allocation for function were services (one reported) and grant-making (two reported and clearly inseparable). This means that more MCACs are funding public art than are tasked primarily with the funding of public art; what is in many places a dedicated activity with a dedicated funding source, is merely a part of the duties of an MCAC—and perhaps an insignificant one, given that the respondents did not necessarily list it as a primary function.³⁵

The issue with programming may be quite different. “Programming” is a more nebulous concept. Interviews indicated that “programming” meant anything

³⁵ This may also indicate some bias in the representatives. Perhaps less time or energy is spent on this task, or it is simple not the favored issue of the person who filled out the survey.

from organizing an informal, no-cost lecture series to producing theater or running a gallery.

CONCLUSION

Results

The results of my research have this far indicated that MCACs are a discrete type of LAA and further research is possible to establish approximately how many there are, what their effects are, what best practices are for establishing and governing them, and, possibly, how best to provide them with a network.

The survey, limited though it was, verified my expectations. All of the valid MCACs are in incorporated places. They operate on a public model (all have appointed, uncompensated members). Most are primarily advisory boards that make recommendations for action and almost all make these recommendations to the municipality. The populations served by my research sample are all under 200,000 people. In more than half the cases, the driving force behind the establishment was internal and community based. This means that six of the seven characteristics I identified are shared by the majority of MCACs.

The budgetary differences, however, do not align with my anticipated results. The variation in budgets did not appear to have direct correlation to any other characteristic. Further data may clarify that, such as economic census data for the municipality, but overall, these results are inconclusive. There does seem to be a culture in Washington that leads to more and better funded MCACs, in part due to county ordinance and perhaps in part due to attitudes towards the arts differing. However, based on Ms. Mobley's interview, this may also be changing.

Validation & Further Research

This exploratory research is by no means conclusive. As intended, it brought up more questions than it answered. Further research is absolutely necessary to reach more specific results. Additionally, further research will allow practical application of the results, where this research is largely conceptual.

Many MCACs have indicated a largely advisory function, often advising the local government on matters of horizontal integration of arts and culture into an economic development or strategic city plan. Further research could aid the MCACs and their respective governments in identifying effective strategies depending on their shared characteristics and needs. This would help eliminate the constant reinvention of the model. Likewise, sharing information would present valuable concepts to municipalities facing the same issues that have not yet considered solving them through the integration of an arts and culture plan.

Further research would need to be conducted in several steps, beginning with a thorough search for appropriate research subject. First, the search for MCACs must be expanded. Lansdowne, the inspiration for this research, makes no mention of the Arts Board on its website with the exception of the Events Calendar where Arts Board meetings and functions are listed, and the Facebook page (created in December of 2012) appears toward the bottom of the first page of results when searching Google for “Lansdowne Arts Board”. Given this, it is certainly not impossible that there are other MCACs across the country that have little or no web presence and are utterly unknown outside of their community. One solution to this problem is to use Americans for the Arts’ member listserv to

reach out to over 1,200 LAAs, as well as the State and Regional Arts Agencies to distribute a survey to all LAAs.

This method of distribution could unearth a larger population sample, and a detailed survey could help write an even more specific definition of the MCAC. It is clear that MCACs are a distinct type of Local Arts Agencies, but exactly how to define the distinction remains slightly unclear. Size of population is certainly an issue to be considered. The question of “how small is small” must be answered in order to move forward. My proposal is to include only municipalities wherein the mayor is uncompensated, thus, no matter the location or population, geographical or budget size, the locality will have a small-town quality. Areas that could be examined via further research include detailed analysis of governance and staff structures, compensation, a detailed look at budgets, funding, programming and Percent for Art duties in context to these functions.

In the short term, research should also discover what conditions lead to the formation of MCACs in order to find the problems that they hope to solve and track their success. It should quantify their programming and collate their governance for long-term tracking. The sooner research is embarked upon, the more data will become available to study growth trends and success rates. In the long term, studies could show how specific government support, that with “teeth behind it,” as Councilperson Lustgarten put it, affects the culture and economy of a community and establish best practices for MCACs to ensure healthy longevity.

Appendix 1- Survey Text

| | |
|---|--|
| What was the inspiration for the formation of this entity? | (another locality, county ordinance, internal, other (open)) |
| How is the geographical area you serve classified (Borough, Township, Village, etc.)? | (open) |
| What is the approximate size of the population this entity serves? | (open) |
| Are the members of this entity appointed by local government? | (yes/no) |
| Are the terms limited for members of this entity? | (yes/no) |
| Does this entity have a budget? | (yes/no) |
| If so, how large is the budget for this entity? | (<\$5k, \$5k-\$10k, >\$10k) |
| If there is a budget, how is it funded? | (open) |
| If there is a budget, how is it allocated? | (open) |
| What is this entity's main function? | (advisory, programming, funding, service, other (open)) |
| Would you be willing and able to share your founding documents or be interviewed briefly for research purposes? | (yes- I can share documents, yes-I would be willing to be interviewed, no) |
| If so, who may I contact to request that documentation? | (name (open), email address (open), phone number (open)) |
| Would it be helpful to this entity to have a network of similar entities with which to share information, ideas and wisdom? | (yes, no, other (open)) |

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